Shrinathji, a form of Krishna, first appears in a hill called Goverdhan, in Vraj. He spends his childhood years here. The stories about how the idol of Shrinathji was discovered and how Shrinathji's Pratham Milan with Vallabhacharya took place are worth reflecting upon.

Sadu Pande's cow: Ghummar

Sadu Pande, the chieftain of a small town called Anyor, lived below the hill of Goverdhan. He owned a cow called Ghummar whose ancestors had belonged to Nanda, the father of Krishna. When Krishna appeared in Goverdhan Parvat, Ghummar started slipping out of Sadu Pande's house. She would walk up the hill of Goverdhan and give Krishna all her milk, twice in a day, every day.

The upraised hand of Shrinathji

Sadu Pande wondered what Ghummar was up to. So he followed her. He saw her feeding an unknown entity that seemed to be hiding in the hills. When he inspected the spot, he was awestruck to see the left upraised palm of a black idol there. The news spread like wildfire.

The seniors of Vraj recollected how Krishna had lifted the entire hill of Goverdhan on the little finger of his left hand for 7 days to protect them from Indra’s wrath. The Vrajvasis** intuitively sensed that Krishna had taken a different form to bless them all. They thronged around the hill of Goverdhan to get a glimpse of Krishna’s upraised hand and offered him all his favourite food.

The idol of Shrinathji

Several decades later, the face and then the entire idol of Shrinathji was unearthed from the hill of Goverdhan. Vallabhacharya, the founder of Pushti Marg, the path of Grace, was travelling throughout India on foot at this time. He was keen on spreading the concept of cultivating a personal connection with God to all the people.

When he got the news of the discovery of Shrinathji’s idol in the hill of Goverdhan, he decided to visit Vraj immediately. He reached Anyor late in the night so he spent the night in Sadu Pande’s house and got all the information about the discovery from him.

Vallabhacharya intuitively guessed that the idol that was discovered by Ghummar and the Vrajvasis would

be the presiding deity of all the people who followed Pushti Marg.

Pratham Milan

Vallabhacharya was eager to meet Shrinathji. So the next day, he climbed up the hill of Goverdhan quickly and ran to meet Shrinathji. That moment when Shrinathji and Vallabhachary met and hugged each other warmly for the first time is now famously referred to as "Pratham Milan” which means “The first meeting”.

This “Milan” has a deep spiritual significance because people who follow Pushti Marg believe that Vallabhacharya too is an incarnation of Krishna. When we look at it in this context, we understand why “Pratham Milan” is treated with such great reverence. “Pratham Milan” is a confluence of divine energy!

- Many devotees believe that he is an avatar of Agni, the god of fire.

Temple at Jatipura

Vallabhacharya then instructed the Vrajvasis to construct a small temple below the hill of Goverdhan in Jatipura. One day, Vallabhacharya met a Kshatriya called Pooranmal. They decided to construct a big temple on the hill of Goverdhan for Shrinathji. They

appointed an architect called Hiramani from Agra to draw up the plans for the temple. The construction began in right earnest. But after a few years, Pooranmal ran out of money. So the entire project was put on hold. It took Pooranmal another 20 years to earn enough money to complete the project. The combined effort of all these people bore fruit when Shrinathji was finally enshrined in this beautiful temple atop the hill of Goverdhan on Akshay Tritiya.

Gopalpura: a village full of cows

The Vrajvasis knew that Krishna loved cows, milk and butter. They would come with offerings of milk and butter but would also bring along a cow or two as a gift for Shrinathji. So a village called Gopalpura was created to provide shelter for all these cows and to take care of them.

The functioning of the temple

An ardent devotee of Krishna called Ramdas lived in “Apsara Kund” below the hill of Goverdhan. Vallabhacharya requested Ramdas to serve the idol of Shrinathji in the new temple. Ramdas was very happy to get this opportunity. Vallabhacharya discussed the various aspects of offering ‘seva’ (service) to Shrinathji

with Ramdas in detail. Vallabhacharya appointed Madhavanand, a Bengali devotee, as the supervisor of the temple. He also asked Krishnadas, a devotee from Gujarat, to take charge of things and ensure that things functioned smoothly within the temple premises.

All was well for several years after that. Shrinathji became the presiding deity of all the people who followed Pushti Marg. After Vallabhacharya, Vittalnathji (a.k.a. Gusainji) took up the onus of guiding all the people about the importance of connecting to Shrinathji and anyone form of Krishna at a personal level. Gusainji's son, Giridharji continued to do so too for many years too.

Shrinathji's trip to Mathura

Gusainji and Giridharji lived in Mathura. They wanted the people of Mathura to get the benefit of Shrinathji's grace. So they lifted the idol of Shrinathji on to a chariot and brought it to their home in Mathura. The idol was kept there for two months and was taken back to the temple atop the hill of Goverdhan on Narasimha Chaudas.

Gusainji's sixth sense

Several years later, when Gusainji was on his way to Dwarka, he came across a beautiful spot in Sinhad, Mewar. HariVamsh chacha, a senior devotee was with him at that time. Gusainji said, “I feel that the idol of Shrinathji will be enshrined here several years after my demise!” Years later, Gusainji’s prediction turned out to be true!

Shrinathji’s promise to Ajab Kumari Bai

The king of Mewar, UdaySingh had come to meet Gusainji at this time. His daughter-in-law, Ajab Kumari Bai was eager to offer her ‘seva’ to Gusainji. Gusainji was pleased with her service and said, “Shrinathji will come here to play ‘Chaupar’ (Ludo) with you every day!”

Ajab Kumari was happy to play a game of ‘Chaupar’ with the lord himself every day but felt that the lord was straining himself in the process. So she asked Shrinathji to change his place of residence and live in Sinhad itself. Shrinathji says, “I will reside here, in this very spot but after several years!”

Shrinathji does keep his promise to Ajab Kumari but the details of this long arduous journey is described in the article titled “Shrinathji and His journey to Nathdwara.”

- ✶ Vraj is commonly referred to as Vrajbhoomi by the devotees of Krishna. It is a region mainly comprising of Mathura, Vrindavan and Gokul in Uttar Pradesh. But other cities like Jalesar, Bharatpur, Agra, Farrukhabad, Hathras, Dholpur, Aligarh, Etawah, Auraiya, Mainpuri, Etah, Kasganj and Firozabad too are a part of it.
- ✶ There are approximately 1300 villages in this area. The river Yamuna flows through Vraj. Gokul lies on the eastern side and Mathura, Vrindavan and Goverdhan lie on the western side of the Yamuna.

** The people of Vraj are known as Vrajvasis.

- It is believed that Vallabhacharya was born in Champaran on the same day that the Vrajvasis unearthed the face of Shrinathji on the hill of Goverdhan.